Unit .04

Session .03

God Overrides Evil with Good

Scripture

Genesis 42:1-6; 45:4-8; 50:15-21

1 When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt,
he said to his sons, "Why do you keep looking at each
other? **2** Listen," he went on, "I have heard there is
grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us
so that we will live and not die." **3** So ten of Joseph's
brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt. **4** But
Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his
brothers, for he thought, "Something might happen to
him." **5** The sons of Israel were among those who came
to buy grain, for the famine was in the land of Canaan.
6 Joseph was in charge of the country; he sold grain
to all its people. His brothers came and bowed down
before him with their faces to the ground. … **4** Then
Joseph said to his brothers, "Please, come near me,"
and they came near. "I am Joseph, your brother," he
said, "the one you sold into Egypt. **5** And now don't
be grieved or angry with yourselves for selling me here,
because God sent me ahead of you to preserve life.
6 For the famine has been in the land these two years,
and there will be five more years without plowing or
harvesting. **7** God sent me ahead of you to establish
you as a remnant within the land and to keep you alive
by a great deliverance. **8** Therefore it was not you who
sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to
Pharaoh, lord of his entire household, and ruler over all
the land of Egypt. … **15** When Joseph's brothers saw
that their father was dead, they said to one another, "If
Joseph is holding a grudge against us, he will certainly
repay us for all the suffering we caused him." **16** So
they sent this message to Joseph, "Before he died your
father gave a command: **17** 'Say this to Joseph: Please
forgive your brothers' transgression and their sin—the
suffering they caused you.' Therefore, please forgive
the transgression of the servants of the God of your
father." Joseph wept when their message came to him.
18 His brothers also came to him, bowed down before
him, and said, "We are your slaves!" **19** But Joseph
said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of
God? **20** You planned evil against me; God planned it
for good to bring about the present result—the survival
of many people. **21** Therefore don't be afraid. I will
take care of you and your children." And he comforted
them and spoke kindly to them.

Intro Options

Main Point:
God can bring good out of evil circumstances.

Option 1

Read aloud the following quote by Frederick Buechner:

> Of the seven deadly sins, anger is possibly the most fun. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savor to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back—in many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you.[1]

Ask students to think of a person toward whom they hold feelings of anger, resentment, and unforgiveness. Then ask them how they think they, as well as the unforgiven person, might be affected if they continue to harbor these feelings rather than offer forgiveness.

Admit it is difficult to forgive the person you feel bitter toward. Challenge students to spend a few moments praying for that person and asking God to help them forgive that person. Encourage them to continue to pray until they are able to forgive

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Option 2

Growing a skill takes practice. When it comes to the world of sports, building muscle memory isn't as easy as you might think. Muscle memory might be best built in phases.

- Phase 1: Test the skill in a known environment. Perform the actions the same way until you can perform it successfully without much thought. Estimate how many times you had to repeat the action to get to this point, then repeat the action again with your new technique.
- Phase 2: Use the new technique, but in different environments and situations. When you're able to repeat this skill in new situations, move on to the final phase of creating muscle memory.
- Phase 3: Go random. Mix up the situations, environments, and number of repetitions.[2]

Repetitive action is difficult, grueling work. Some people give up, and most are likely tempted to do so. However, the pain of the moment when practicing is well worth the end result of a new and valuable skill. Although Joseph wasn't necessarily building a skill, he was learning to trust in God and His promises. God brought good to Joseph and others through all the adversity in Joseph's life.

TEACHING PLAN

Foreshadowing is one of the most powerful literary devices in Joseph's story. When the story began, we met Joseph—Jacob's favored son—and his brothers who were consumed by hatred because Joseph shared two dreams with them that depicted his brothers bowing before him. When his brothers sold Joseph into slavery and he was taken to Egypt, they likely mocked the dreams. Certainly there was no way he would rule over them then. However, roughly twenty years later the brothers would see just how wrong they were about Joseph and his dreams.

Read Genesis 42:1-6.

Jacob and his family were not exempt from the famine. Their situation, like that of many others, was dire: They were on the brink of starvation. While the sons sat and looked at each other—either unable or unwilling to act to save their own lives—their elderly father with poor eyesight could see what they could not. Egypt had food. Little did they know the reason Egypt had grain—only because of the vision God had given Joseph.

- **Joseph's brothers coming to Egypt was an important part of God's plan to save them from the famine, but God was also at work to restore their broken family. What does this show us about God's heart?**

When Joseph's brothers arrived in Egypt, they had to go before the man in charge of the grain: Joseph. The brothers did not recognize Joseph (42:7-8). While the brothers did not recognize Joseph, he recognized them. Joseph treated them like strangers, not letting on that he knew who they were, and harshly asked where they had come from. Their answer of Canaan surely confirmed to Joseph that they were his brothers.

- **How would you have responded if you faced a similar situation? Would you want revenge or extend mercy?**

Through a series of acts Joseph tested his brothers to see if they had changed or to give them the opportunity to repent of their sin if they had not. (See Commentary.) Though the brothers' spoken repentance is not recorded, when Joseph demanded that Benjamin become his prisoner, Judah offered himself instead (44:18-34). Judah had been the one to suggest selling Joseph to the Ishmaelite traders. But in this situation, he was willing to take the place of the falsely accused, Benjamin. Once Judah had conspired to rid himself of a favored brother; here he stepped in to take the punishment for a favored brother. Judah's heart had changed, a hallmark of repentance.

- **How quick or slow are you to repent of your sin? Why?**

99 Essential Doctrines *(p. 24, DDG)*

God's Plan and Human Action

God's sovereignty over all of life encompasses the free actions of human beings. Proverbs 19:21 says, "Many plans are in a man's heart, but the LORD's decree will prevail." In ways we are unable to comprehend fully, the Lord's plan goes forward through the choices of human beings as moral agents. Even freely chosen sinful actions are factored into God's overarching plan, as is the case with the crucifixion of Jesus—an event both purposed by God through foreknowledge and yet also carried out by the wicked decisions of human beings (Acts 2:23). Knowing that God is working all things for the good of those who love Him (Rom. 8:28), we trust in His promise to fulfill His plan, even when we do not understand our present circumstances.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God can bring good out of evil circumstances.

Genesis 42

42:1-5. Twenty years before, Jacob had sent Joseph to his brothers and they devised a plan to end his life, but sold him into slavery in Egypt instead. Here, Jacob was sending the brothers to Egypt, where God was arranging a divine appointment with Joseph so that he might preserve their lives. Once again, we see God using redemptive reversal. God was at work bringing Joseph's brothers to him to restore this family and provide for them during the remainder of the famine.

But one brother would not go: Benjamin. Years before, the brothers believed by ridding themselves of Joseph, they were ridding themselves of Jacob's favoritism as well. They didn't. Instead, Jacob's favoritism shifted from Joseph to his younger brother, Benjamin (also the son of Jacob's beloved wife, Rachel). Jacob did not send Benjamin to Egypt because he feared something might happen to him, foreshadowing what was to come. The sin of favoritism continued to plague this family, and soon, the brothers' response to it would be put to the test.

42:6. When the brothers stood before Joseph, the first thing they did was fulfill Joseph's dream—the very one they had detested. They bowed low to the ground before their brother. Joseph's first dream had been of sheaves of grain—his stood while his brothers' bowed down. In Egypt, the brothers came in need of grain (their sheaves had fallen), while Joseph had plenty of grain (his sheaf stood tall). With that simple act, the brothers did what they believed they would never do and what had driven them to such fury. Though they didn't know at the time, bowing would preserve their lives.

The process toward repentance was not easy for the brothers, or for Joseph, who had to put them through quite an ordeal to bring them to the point where they considered their sin. However, Joseph did not force his brothers to repent. He used the wisdom the Lord had given him to implement the Lord's plan according to the Lord's instructions to lead his brothers to repentance (Prov. 21:1).

In Defense *(p. 25, DDG)*

The natural response to experiencing suffering is to ask the "why" questions: "Why is this happening?" "Why did God allow this?" "Why me?" While it is common for people to ask the "why" questions in times like these, greater peace of heart and mind come from answering the "who" question instead (Job 1:20-22). When we ask the "who" questions, like Job and Joseph, we come face to face with the God who is sovereignly in control of all things and works all things for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purposes (Rom. 8:28). Whatever the source of our suffering might be, knowing God is good and sovereign brings the type of lasting comfort we are really looking for during difficult times.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Genesis 45:4-8.

Joseph was overcome with emotion, weeping when he saw Benjamin and over Judah's willingness to sacrifice for Benjamin (43:30-31; 44:18–45:3). Any hardness in his heart gave way to the greater power of love and forgiveness that comes only from God.

When Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers, he did not minimize their sins against him. He didn't remind them of what they had done to hold it against them, but to reveal his forgiveness and God's plan. Joseph called his brothers near and encouraged them not to be grieved or angry with themselves for what they had done. He had forgiven them, but beyond that, God had worked through their actions. God's plan to preserve their family, the line of the Messiah, was not hindered by their sin against God and Joseph; rather, God's plan continued through it.

- **How does God's forgiveness of your sin change the way you extend forgiveness to others?**

Read Genesis 50:15-21.

Joseph encouraged them not to be afraid and indicated that he trusted in God's justice. He said he was not in God's place—what they intended for evil, God used for good to save many lives. So Joseph forgave them, comforted them, and took care of them and their families. He showed amazing grace to his brothers.

Joseph kept his eyes on God and not on his circumstances or the people who had sinned against him. He did not hold his exalted position over his brothers or hold a grudge against them. He did not lament the time lost with his father and brothers or the time he spent in jail. He looked toward God and trusted God's plan for his life. He knew God turned what his brothers meant for evil into good.

- **God brings good even from evil. How does this give you confidence, comfort, and hope as you navigate trials?**

Activity

For this activity, you will need 22 average size nails and a block of wood that measures at least 4-by-4-by-2 feet. Before group time, lightly hammer one nail into the center of the block, leaving the majority of the nail and nail-head still exposed. The objective is to get your students to figure out how they can balance the remaining 21 nails on the head of this one nail. To figure out how to do accomplish this before group time, you can search online "21 nail balance." Allow students time to think through this challenge on their own, offering tips and suggestions when needed. After they figure it out or after you reveal to them how to do it, explain that suffering can be like that too. In other words, first we only see a bunch of individual pieces of hurt and sorrow and trying to fit them together just doesn't make sense. However, when viewed at from a Christian perspective, the pain and suffering does begin to make sense, especially knowing what God might bring out of it.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God can bring good out of evil circumstances.

Genesis 49-50

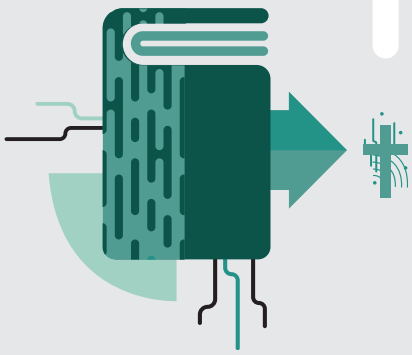
49:8-10. The Messiah would come from the line of Judah (Gen. 49:8-10), not the line of Joseph. We see a change in Judah's character throughout Joseph's story. Judah devised the plan to sell Joseph into slavery, but later on he was willing to substitute his life for Benjamin's (Gen. 43:9; 44:33). The Lion from the Tribe of Judah—Jesus Christ—would substitute Himself, dying on the cross for the sins of the world.

50:15-21.

> Despite having lived under Joseph's provision and protection for many years, and despite knowing that Joseph had named one son Manasseh ("God has made me forget all my hardship in my father's house"), the brothers still doubted that Joseph had forgiven them. With Jacob now dead, Joseph's older brothers feared for their lives and hoped that saying their father called for forgiveness before he died would protect them from Joseph's wrath. They were so afraid of Joseph that they did not dare at first to come to him personally; instead, they only sent a message entreating him to forgive his brothers' "rebellion" (transgression) and sin, especially since they were "slaves" (servants) of the God of your father—that is, they worshiped the same God that Joseph did. Perhaps the reason the brothers came to Joseph was that they heard he had wept when he received their message. To maximize their chances of survival they bowed down before him (cp. 37:7,9) and offered themselves as his personal slaves.
>
> Joseph refused their offer. They were slaves of God, not of him, and he would not put himself in the place of God to make them his slaves. He admitted that his older brothers planned evil against him, but with great spiritual insight he also confessed that God planned it for good to bring about . . . the survival of many people (see note at 45:5-8). God had transformed the soot of human sin into a diamond of divine blessing (Rm 8:28; 1Pt 2:24). Far from being embittered, Joseph was emboldened to take care of the very ones who had tried to kill him, along with their children. He spoke kindly to them (lit "spoke upon their heart"; cp. Is 40:2) and comforted them.[2]

(p. 26, DDG) Christ Connection

God used Joseph's brothers' evil deeds for His greater plan of providing salvation from the famine. In the same way, God used the evil injustice of those who crucified His Son, Jesus, to bring about His master plan of providing salvation from sin and death.



GOD OVERRIDES EVIL WITH GOOD

Genesis 42:1–6, 45:4–8, 50:15–21

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JESUS CONNECTION

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LIFEWISE QUALITY

FORGIVENESS – Erasing a debt that another person owes me.

HEAD

How did Joseph respond to his brothers when they came for food the first time? The second time?

Why did Joseph's brothers think they needed to protect themselves from Joseph after Jacob died (Genesis 50)? What did Joseph tell them?

HEART

Give three reasons why we sometimes find it difficult to forgive others who have offended or wronged us.

Why do you think Joseph was able to forgive his brothers for what they did? How can his reasons help us forgive others who wrong us?

HANDS

Since Jesus is the Savior who offers forgiveness to the world, how important is it to take the message of His forgiveness to everyone? What would it look like for you to share that message?

Do you need to extend forgiveness to someone? What step will you take to do that?